

# Survival in the South

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BY

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FREEMAN

## DRAMATIS PERSONAE

<b>Narrator,</b>	<i>an Eskimo woman</i>
<b>Minnie Aodla,</b>	<i>a young translator on her first visit to the south</i>
<b>Mr. Gordon</b>	<i>Employees of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada</i>
<b>Director</b>	
<b>A woman</b>	
<b>Matron,</b>	<i>superintendent of the women's residence</i>
<b>Jane,</b>	<i>Minnie's roommate at the residence</i>
<b>Police Officer</b>	
<b>Receptionist</b>	<i>at a hairdressing salon</i>

## PROLOGUE

**Narrator:** There is no doubt that much has been written about Eskimo people. There is also no doubt that there is little known about their basic culture.

Traditionally Eskimos were nomadic; survival at every season depended on their hunting success. Such was the manner of my early life. My parents belonged to a group that moved around Hudson Bay and James Bay region. According to Qallunaat history books, Henry Hudson had discovered Hudson and James Bay. To me, he visited and saw the region, but my ancestors found it long before him.

My grandfather was the leader of seven families. He had led these people in the late 1800s up to 1940s from the Belcher Islands along the coast of Hudson Bay and James Bay, until he found Cape Hope Island which he named after himself, "Weetaltuk Island." There he settled the seven families. To lead people in our culture one has to have wisdom concerning human nature, knowledge of the weather, and the ability to predict where and when the hunting will be most successful. No moves are made till the leader says so. Though he led the group it does not mean he made every choice for every individual. Family heads still had to lead their own families in matters such as bringing up children. In my culture I was brought up to listen and obey my elders, not to ask but to follow, and not to give advice until I have reached that stage where I am considered to have gained wisdom. Not until I am on my own, such as after marriage, was I allowed to choose my clothing and what I wanted to do. As long as I was with my guardians I had no choice but to take what was given to me.

I came South before I was ever considered in my culture "to be on my own." On arrival in the south, I suddenly found myself in a totally new world, and had to start learning from the beginning once again how to survive each day.

But how does one live in a totally different world and yet survive? My parents always told me, when not knowing what to do, and consequently afraid, I should always put on my best front — that is, smile, use my sense of humour and above all remember to be curious and alert so as to take every advantage of opportunities to learn new things. Moreover, as I grew older...

...I was taught never to react outwardly to exasperation.

*(Sound: train — loud then fade)*

I alight from the train on my arrival in the South for the first time.

*(Train enters, brakes, changes into people)*

So many gates. Which one should I use?...How are people going to know I have arrived? What shall I do?...I wish I was home and could see a familiar face...so many people, moving like maggots on rotten meat.

*(All stop — continue)*

How long am I going to stand here? Oh! the ground is hard on my feet. I suppose I am not allowed to take my shoes off? It is so hot.

**Mr. Gordon:** Miss Aodala? *(All stop)* My name is Gordon. Did you have a good trip? I'll look after your luggage, you will live in a very nice place. You will work with some very nice people, you will have a very nice time. Oh, you have the baggage tickets? Simply follow me.

*(All start)*

**Narrator:** So many people! doing so many different things...walking... talking...eating...drinking...reading and someone talking in a cupboard!... Oh. I am so hot!, my feet ache...everything is going so fast.

**Mr. Gordon:** Now I'll drive you to where you live...you'll like it there, there are over 300 girls. You'll eat there...you'll meet the matron there...you'll get everything you want there...bla bla bla bla...

**Narrator:** I still have to travel?...300 girls? All I want right now is a tent to myself to have a good cry and see my parents.

*(Cue for green traffic lights, traffic goes mad)*

*(Shouting)* How does he know which car to take? My first car ride...oh, he's going to hit another one...look in front of me...so many cars... where are they going?...

*(Cue for red light, traffic stops)*

Why have we stopped?

*(Cue for green light, traffic starts)*

Oh, so many things to see, so many stores...so many people walking fast and looking so sad...look at the height of that house.

*(Traffic exits)*

**Mr. Gordon:** Here we are, only a short trip, I'll take your luggage...

**Narrator:** He is so concerned about my luggage.

**Mr. Gordon:** Ah, matron. *(Minnie sits)* Eskimo! Never been South before, she'll need extra help, you'll have to show her round, explain the rules, etc. *(They both look at her)* Must be tired, been on the train two days—o.k.?—I'll see her in the office tomorrow, make sure she gets there, 8:30 sharp. See ya tomorrow Miss Aodala—Gee, look at the time, I gotta fly—pew—*(Exits)*

**Matron:** Miss Aodolah. I am the matron here. Come this way and I'll show you to your room. You will have a roommate but you won't meet

her yet as she is still working....Oh, here is the book of house rules— follow me...

**Narrator:** Oh my feet ache—it is so hot.

**Matron:** This is your room...here is your locker...the combination is 141256—141256—got that? Your bed will be changed once a week, meals are from 6:30 to 7:30 a.m., 11:30 to 12:30 noon and 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. Make sure you're not late for meals, you pay for your room at the end of each month. Here is your key...just come any time you are having problems, and don't forget to study the house rules.

*(Exit)*

**Narrator:** So many things I mustn't forget, so many things I must remember, lock combination, change the bed, meal hours, paying my room. I wonder if the girl I room with has to do the same? I will just follow her...she will soon come...Oh I am afraid, I wish to go home and see someone I know and talk to someone oh — someone is coming.

**Jane:** Hi! *(Loud)*

**Minnie:** *(No answer)*

**Jane:** My name Jane...you...Eskimo?!

**Minnie:** Yes.

**Jane:** Really! Uh...where do Eskimos come from?

**Minnie:** From the Arctic.

**Jane:** Arctic, eh — uh — I learned in Geography that Eskimos rub noses — live in snow houses, and — eat raw meat — Did you do all that?

**Narrator:** This girl has no self control.

**Minnie:** Yes!

**Jane:** Really? *(Pause)* Are you shy? You don't say much. I guess you're shy.

**Narrator:** True, no sense of control.

**Jane:** Say, what's your name? What'll we call you?

**Minnie:** Minnie — Minnie Aodla.

**Jane:** Gee, that's cute, my name's Jane.

*(Pause)*

**Minnie:** Can I unpack my things?

**Jane:** Sure! I'll help. Oh, that's real cute — oh — yeah — heh — that's nice — aha — oh yeah. *(She hangs them up)* But, is that all? But...where are your clothes?

**Minnie:** There.

**Jane:** I mean your own...*personal*...clothes.

**Minnie:** They are mine.

**Jane:** No, your clothes where you come from, you know, SKINS!

*(Pause)*

**Narrator:** This girl is out of control.

**Jane:** Sorry. I didn't mean to pry into your affairs, I really expected skins.

**Narrator:** I do wish not to be so shy. I would take time to inform her about skin clothing.

**Jane:** Well, I guess it's bedtime. Are you working tomorrow?

**Minnie:** Yes.

**Jane:** Where? With who?

**Minnie:** Indian and Northern Affairs.

**Jane:** Doing what?

**Minnie:** Translating.

**Jane:** From your language to ours?

**Minnie:** I guess. I will know better tomorrow.

**Jane:** Well, time to turn in — *(She begins to undress, turns away from Minnie, lights fade)* Good night Minnie.

**Minnie:** Good night Jane.

*(Sound of breakfast, etc., all cast enters for breakfast, eat on their feet and go, leaving Minnie stranded)*

**Woman:** Oh. I can't remember your name. Matron did tell me yesterday...er — are you the Eskimo?

**Narrator:** She is out of control too.

**Woman:** Fine! I'll take you to the office, simply follow me.

*(They walk to the street crossing, then stop is the cue for the red traffic lights, enter traffic, rush by and then exit. Exit is cue for green traffic lights, Minnie follows woman)*

**Narrator:** Nothing seems to bother her. There is so much to see and yet she doesn't seem to notice anything. She seems to have only one thing in her mind, to get to her destination...my feet ache...how far yet to go? Now, what are we waiting for? A bell?

*(All rush into the elevator which ascends)*

I'm squashed — I can't breathe — we go upwards — want air — oh.

*(Elevator arrives — crowd disperses)*

**Director:** Ah, here we are, glad to meet you again Miss Aodala...Are you ready to work for me?

**Narrator:** He says my name so ugly. Oh I feel shy. What will happen to me now? He looks gentle, but I'm still afraid.

**Director:** I will have to ask you a few questions just so we have something on our files. *(Pause)* If you prefer I can wait till some other time. *(Freeze)*

**Narrator:** He is gentle...How I wish to tell him that I am afraid...that I am not used to what I have gone through for the last twenty-four hours...that I have seen so much that never entered my mind that they exist...that my feet ache...that I have left my family and friends...have endured my first long train ride to a train station...to a car ride...to strange living quarters with strange rules for living...and walked for the first time on a stone path...and for the first time gone up in a strange machine so that my breathing can't seem to take the air outside... Wish this lump in my throat would go away...don't think I can hold those tears anymore...I need to cry...

**Director:** What's wrong? Did I offend you?...I guess you're tired?...You have to answer me so I can help you. Are you not happy where you're living? Did anything happen yesterday? I know — you have a good cry and I'll get you some coffee. *(He goes for some)*  
*(Returning with coffee)* Here we are — I'll show you where your desk is and leave you some letters to translate. I'd like to see them when

you're finished because I have to know how well you do, maybe you'll feel better tomorrow. You can go home at lunch hour, take the afternoon off.

*(He motions to secretary, she follows director, office stops to look at Minnie, then all continue—slow fade and then back on lunch bell—all rush for elevator to descend) (Bell)*

**Narrator:** *(In elevator)* How will I get back home? If I get lost I must ask a police officer. He wears a blue uniform.

*(People rush out)*

I'll just follow those people into the street, I won't pay attention to the names of the streets, I will only look at the signs and colours and shapes. That's how I will remember the way.

*(Exits then returns to street noises)*

**Minnie:** Oh!

*(Light changes to red and traffic bursts in and then out, lights turn green, Minnie moves on)*

**Narrator:** I am very alone...so many tall buildings, I can't see how far the sun has dropped...Ah, there is a police officer. I will ask him where I live.

*(She approaches police officer)*

**Minnie:** Can you please tell me where Sussen Street is?

**Police Officer:** Speak up ma'am. Where was it?

**Minnie:** Please, where is Sussen Street?

**Police Officer:** Sussen? That way, ten blocks.

**Narrator:** Ten blocks. Aukatalangani! My feet are aching, I am so hot, I have to find my way home. I vow to myself tomorrow I will look at my route better. Tomorrow? What is tomorrow? Today is four, the next is five, so tomorrow is number five.

Ah! Today, I don't care if I'm lost all day...I'm going to see many things...I'll just walk and walk. Look at the shops, tall buildings, I will look at anything I can see.

*(Enter revolving door)*

Oh! What is that?

*(She attempts to enter store but doesn't make it; then the hairdresser's shop materializes)*

I will go in here and see what they do. *(Bell)*

*(Enters shop)*

**Receptionist:** Yes. You have an appointment? What is your name? Did you want a wash and set—the works? *(Pause)* Do you speak English?

**Minnie:** Yes.

**Receptionist:** Did you make an appointment to have your hair done?

**Minnie:** No.

**Receptionist:** Well, I guess we can fit you in. What is it you want done?

*(No answer)*

How would you like it done?

**Minnie:** What do you do here?

**Receptionist:** Curled, cut or just dried?

**Minnie:** Everything!

**Receptionist:** You don't want it cut, it's such beautiful hair, is it natural, do you dye it? It's so black.

**Minnie:** Everything!

**Receptionist:** O.K. Marvin! One for the works!

*(Lights red for hair cutting ritual)*

*(They exit leaving Minnie with new hair do)*

**Minnie:** My head feels nice and cool, now I'm ready to work.

*(Change to boardroom scene)*

**Director:** Now, this meeting is called to discuss our future programmes, and top of the list is—er—Miss Aodala—er—we are planning to begin training some of our people from here in the South to enable them to survive in the North. The title of this programme I name called—er—"How to survive in the North" *(general reaction)*. Now, Miss er Aodala—if you have any suggestions for use—we in this group will be very pleased to consider them.

*(Fade to half and focus on Minnie)*

**Narrator:** They ask me how to survive, they don't tell me how to survive in the South...I am not worthy for these people...I am nothing to them; it does not matter whether I survive or not in their country; I am nothing to them, therefore, I have to help them in how to survive in my land—ugh, it's hot in this place...

*(Fade to end)*



Pitseolak Ashoona Women Playing Ayutaqtut 1969